



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

March 21, 2005

The Honorable Karen Bass
Member, California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 2117
Sacramento, CA 95814

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James P. Mayer
Executive Director

RE: SUPPORT FOR ASSEMBLY BILL 855

Dear Assemblymember Bass:

The Little Hoover Commission supports your measure, AB 855, relating to CalWORKs benefit eligibility for non-violent felons.

In its December 2004 report, *Breaking the Barriers for Women on Parole*, the Commission found that the State has not developed an effective correctional strategy for women offenders – the fastest growing portion of the California prison population. Thirty-one percent of female offenders in 2003 were convicted of drug-related offenses. A lifetime ban on access to federal TANF funds for persons convicted of drug-related felonies restricts non-violent female drug offenders from becoming eligible for CalWORKs benefits when they are released from prison. They often are denied assistance with housing, employment, substance abuse treatment, and family reunification.

Not surprisingly nearly half of female offenders released to parole do not succeed and instead return to prison. Their children often are placed in costly foster care, where they are more likely than most to become the next generation of offenders continuing the cycle of crime and perpetuating the costs of incarceration.

The Commission concluded that improving outcomes for women on parole could not only reduce public costs and improve public safety, but also could positively impact the lives of California's children. The Commission recommended that the State develop a community-based re-entry model to reduce recidivism among women offenders, improve public safety and reduce public costs. For the community re-entry model to be effective, the Commission stated that specific actions needed to be taken to reduce legal and practical barriers to re-entry for female offenders. Specifically, the Commission recommended that legislation immediately be enacted to eliminate or modify the ban on CalWORKs for certain non-violent drug felons to improve access to assistance critical to successful re-entry.

AB 855 addresses the Commission's recommendation by establishing eligibility for CalWORKs cash assistance and services for persons convicted of non-violent drug-related felonies. For these reasons, the Commission is taking an active support position on the measure. As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let me know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

c: Commissioners